

**GLOBAL CITIZENS, NATIONAL POLITICS:
Transnational Activism and Government Reaction in Mexico**

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Introduction

Transnational business and trade are commonly subject to state regulation, and treaties and other political agreements between two or more states are grounded in policy negotiated by both governments prior to implementation. Diplomatic ties between governments and international commerce are maintained through a variety of formal and informal institutionalized mechanisms that give states input into international dealings in both the private sector and the government sector. There is, however, no clear set of rules or institutions which regulate transnational civic activity: people interacting across borders who are primarily representing neither their states nor business interests. Perhaps it is not so surprising that transnational cooperation between citizens and citizen organizations is raising a whole new set of issues for state policy. This paper will contribute to the discussion around “global civil society” by examining the role of states in promoting and restraining transnational civic participation. In other words, it will address the question of what happens when groups and individuals “acting globally” collide with national politics and policies.

What happens when civil society goes global? As Hyden (1997: 13) has observed, “Civil society means different things to different people. All the same, there is a tendency for most analysts to define civil society as the realm of organized social life standing between the individual and the state. The consequence of this outlook is that civil society tends to be analyzed primarily in the context of a single country... Many of the organizations that actively engage in advocating certain issues operate across national boundaries. They interpret issues in a global context and are interested in fostering civic values that apply to the global arena.” The growing links between non-governmental and popular organizations, social movements, civic associations, foundations and individuals across national boundaries certainly seem to indicate

some type of globalization of civil society. Macdonald summarizes one view which claims that the notion of global civil society is “a new way of challenging the realist view of the nation-state as the primary actor in international politics” (Macdonald, 1994: 273). While recent scholarship on the subject has devoted much attention to defining global civil society, no consensus around a precise meaning has been reached (Boulding 1991; Ghils 1992; MacDonald 1994; Lipschutz 1996; Hyden 1997; Turner 1998; among others).

Rather than enter the debate, this paper will rely on an intuitive understanding of the type of national and transnational activity encompassed by the terms civil society and global civil society. The organizations referred to in this paper as actors of civil society and global civil society are nicely summarized in the following list adapted from Keck and Sikkink (1998: 9): international and domestic non-governmental research and advocacy organizations, local social movements, foundations, the media, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, intellectuals and parts of regional and international intergovernmental associations.

One might question whether the concept of global civil society has empirical meaning. There is clear evidence that transnational ties between actors in civil society are increasing and becoming denser. Jackie Smith (1997: 42, 47), for example, found that the number of transnational social movement organizations (groups operating in two or more states and addressing interdependent global problems) more than tripled over the past two decades - from 183 in 1973, to 631 in 1993. John Boli and George Thomas (1997) have also collected impressive data on the growth of international non-governmental organizing over the past 100 years.

Greater density of transnational interaction among groups in civil society is evident in the increasing activity of non-governmental organizations in parallel events organized to coincide

with international conferences, which once were the exclusive domain of states and their agents. This has occurred across a range of issue areas – for example, at United Nations Conferences on environment in Rio de Janeiro, 1992; human rights in Vienna, 1993; and women’s rights in Beijing, 1995. More evidence of transnational activism can be found in funding flows from foundations and NGOs across national borders and in coordinated international campaigns. Examples of the latter from Latin America include organized campaigns by labor in the United States against sweatshop manufacturing in Central America and tri-national labor, women’s and environmental organizing in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico around the North American Free Trade Agreement. Transnational organizing of broader scope includes the movement for women’s suffrage,¹ activities of groups like Rotary International, and more recently, the international anti-land mine campaign,² to name just a few instances.

Many view the growing transnational ties between civic organizations and individuals in different countries as a largely positive trend – a banding together of citizen interests which has the potential to counterbalance the power of state and market actors in an increasingly globalized world. This view, however, is problematic. First, it analytically separates civil society from state. At the domestic level and at the global level, as we shall see, this separation is impossible to make. Civil society and state overlap both in terms of constituencies and domains of action. Second, in pitting theoretically independent civil society protagonists against the state, attention tends to focus on the conditions under which organizations successfully act transnationally to further their agenda. Organizations and movements are seen as actors, while states, in this scenario, are seen as static environments. In reality, states affected by the increased ties between

¹ See Ramirez, et.al., 1997, for an account of the transnational movement for women’s suffrage 1890-1990.

² See Price, 1998 for a detailed account of ‘transnational civil society’s’ campaign against land mines.

nationally based organizations or movements and their international counterparts and supporters are proactive participants in shaping transnational civic activity.

It is not difficult to understand why the state is perceived as a separate entity which is acted upon, rather than proactive. As Davis Slater puts it, “the territorial state, in global times, tends to rest on increasingly fragile and precarious ground, with pressures from below opening up fissures in its territorial control while the globalization of financial, economic and cultural power increasingly impinges on it from above” (Slater 1998: 382). Domestic groups and their transnational allies have become a source of pressure from both below and above. But in optimism to embrace the concept of global civil society, we should not overlook the fact that states are not ceding gracefully to civil society pressures; they are pushing back, and in doing so, helping shape the course of civic action.

States justify their resistance to transnational activism with a two-fold argument based on national sovereignty, questioning, on the one hand, the autonomy, and, on the other, the representativity of so-called “civil society”. From this defensive point of view, the “globalization” which ties domestic civil society groups to foreign organizations may mean that domestic groups become co-opted to represent outside interests, especially when they are dependent on international resources. Even when groups counter that claim and assert their autonomy from outside influences, states point out that domestic civil society groups are not necessarily representative of the greater needs of the citizenry. They are not public organizations – they represent special interests, not general will.

National sovereignty understood both in an external sense, autonomy or independence in relation to other states; and in an internal sense, control over all of its subjects or associations thereof, is threatened. International funding of domestic organizations constitutes a threat to

‘internal’ sovereignty in the sense that the state loses a measure of control over what that domestic organization is able to do. If that funding comes from sources intimately connected to foreign governments and is introduced without going through state channels and without state approval, officials of a state may perceive ‘external’ sovereignty to be threatened.

This paper uses examples from the contemporary experience of diverse civil society groups working for political opening in Mexico to illustrate the integral role of the state in shaping the globalization of civil society. I will examine how transnational civic cooperation is simultaneously constrained and motivated by state actions. The examples to be discussed all revolve around issues of citizens’ rights: the political right to monitor elections, human rights in Chiapas and the economic rights of small debtors.

Keck and Sikkink have argued that with regard to citizens’ rights, “governments are the primary guarantor of rights, but also their primary violators. When a government violates or refuses to recognize rights, individuals and domestic groups often have no recourse within domestic political or judicial arenas.” International collaboration among civil society groups will most likely arise when “channels between domestic groups and their governments are blocked or hampered, or where such channels are ineffective for resolving a conflict.” They refer to this as a boomerang strategy (Keck and Sikkink, 998: 12).

The cases will serve to illustrate how state efforts to constrain domestic actors may, as Keck and Sikkink argue, lead to increased transnational activities, but will also show that a state can sometimes be effective not only in curbing the activities of domestic actors, but also those of international actors. The boomerang pattern is shaped not only by civil society actors reacting to the state, it is also shaped by the state – sometimes to its advantage, sometimes not.

Political Rights and Election Monitoring

The issue of autonomy of civil society groups often revolves around the question of funding. The Mexican government has clearly treated the funding of national NGO networks involved in political reform as an issue of national sovereignty. During Mexico's Federal elections in 1997, for example, the state made several significant moves to limit domestic and international cooperation around election observing, each with direct reference to national sovereignty, either internally, externally or both.

First, the Secretary of Exterior Relations blocked a donation of \$340,000 from the European Union to the Mexican Academy of Human Rights (AMDH) that was earmarked for monitoring the July 1997 elections. The grant, approved by the European Union in November 1996, was to be given directly to the Mexican Academy of Human Rights. The money was to be used to fund activities in the Federal District, including monitoring campaign spending and party and local electoral commission officials' conformity with electoral law. The elections in the D.F. were particularly significant in that 1997 was the first time citizens would elect the Head of Government of Mexico City, a position which until 1997 was designated by presidential appointment. The front-runner and eventual winner was Cuahutemoc Cárdenas of the left opposition Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The Secretary of Exterior Relations held up the donation on grounds that this type of aid was not included in bilateral agreements between Mexico and the European Union. Human rights and electoral observation were not officially designated aid categories. In addition, the donation had been negotiated directly with the Mexican Academy of Human Rights. The Secretary of Exterior Relations held that this violated a 1991 agreement stipulating that the Mexican government must be consulted and grant its permission prior to such negotiations.

Two months before the elections, in May 1997, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) intervened, suggesting that the European Union money be channeled through the IFE's General Fund for Support of Electoral Observation, managed by the United Nations Development Program. However, by this point the European Union was hesitant. It wanted to guarantee that the donation would be used specifically for the Mexican Academy of Human Rights' programs for which the funds had been approved. The electoral code stated that no one group could receive more than 20% of the money held by the Fund for Support of Electoral Observation, and the European Union's donation earmarked for the Mexican Academy of Human Rights would have amounted to much more than 20% of the anticipated total of the fund. In the end, the fund totaled 12 million pesos (about 1.7 million dollars) and was expected to be divided among 65 different organizations. In addition, the paperwork necessary to channel the donation through a United Nations agency was likely to mean that the funds would not become available before the elections, and certainly not in time to support the type of pre-electoral monitoring activities included in the original funding agreement. The Mexican Academy of Human Rights never received the promised funding, and was forced to dramatically curtail its pre-electoral monitoring activities. The state did not anticipate, perhaps, that the Sub-Commission on Human Rights of the European Parliament would react to the block by deciding "to go to Mexico and observe for ourselves" the elections for head of government in Mexico City.

Meanwhile, the Federal Electoral Institute blocked a possible channel for domestic funding of electoral observation by denying the civic association Civic Alliance the opportunity to register for public support as a National Political Group (APN). Despite the fact that the organization qualified according to all of the formal specifications of the electoral code

regulating the formation and registry of National Political Groups, its activity of election observation was deemed inappropriate.

Articles 33, 34 and 35 of the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE) provide for and define National Political Groups as “forms of citizen association which contribute to the development of democratic life and political culture, as well as the creation of better informed public opinion.” The code establishes that National Political Groups may not act as political parties or run candidates, although they may support the candidates and platforms of political parties. Any organization may apply to become an National Political Group provided that it has a directive agency that is national in character, local offices in over ten federal entities, and that it file a petition with over 7,000 signatures of affiliated voters with the Federal Electoral Institute by a given deadline. The benefits of doing so include federal funding to support “editorial, educational, political training, and socioeconomic and political research activities” of the group during the election year. For the 1997 election year, Civic Alliance would have been eligible to receive 1.5 million pesos (over \$200,000) in public funding, along with certain tax exemptions.

Civic Alliance, self-defined as an “open, plural, nonpartisan and impartial citizen organization working for democracy in Mexico,” presented a complete application with 7,701 signatures and fulfilled all of the requirements outlined in the COFIPE. Accordingly, its application was approved, but under the condition that within 30 days the organization eliminate its program of electoral observation. If it did not, the acceptance would be revoked. This was a problem. Civic Alliance is an organization that was built around election observing. When founded in 1994 the association had one single stated objective: promoting a free and fair electoral process by organizing teams of volunteer citizen election observers to monitor election

day procedures and document instances of electoral fraud. The organization's activities have since expanded to include citizen referenda, anti-corruption campaigns and general civic education; however, monitoring of local, state and federal elections has continued to be the major component of its work. Needless to say, Civic Alliance chose not to eliminate electoral observation from its programs, and its registry, along with public funding and tax exemptions, was revoked.

It may be argued that the IFE's Fund for the Support of Electoral Observation would have been the appropriate domestic source of funding for Civic Alliance's activities. On this point, it is important to note two things. First, the amount of government funding for each National Political Group exceeded the amount of government funds any given election observing organization applying to the IFE's Fund might have hoped to receive. Second, money from said Fund were approved at the late date of June 9, 1997, and made available only on June 16, 1997, less than one month before the election. In addition, they were to be used towards activities on election day only – excluding such activities as ongoing pre-election monitoring of campaign finance and spending, fairness in media, and vote buying. Therefore, the IFE Fund was not an equally attractive option for Civic Alliance in seeking domestic support.

A final example of state resistance to international cooperation around electoral observation was clearly demonstrated when the Commission on Governing and Constitutional Points of the Chamber of Deputies launched a motion to reform the electoral code to prohibit all international funding for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for election observing. In March of 1997, Independent Deputy Luis Sanchez Aguilar made the initial proposal that international finance of election observing be specified as unconstitutional. He called it a violation of Article 33, which states that “foreigners may in no way interfere in the political

affairs of the country,” (Tribunal Electoral 1997: 40). His motion came in response to NGO declarations of funding sources made that same month in compliance with the electoral code. Civic Alliance, for example, having been denied government funding as an National Political Group, declared that it had sought and received \$2.4 million pesos from international sources for monitoring the 1997 federal elections. These sources included four Canadian non-governmental organizations: Development and Peace, the International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, Interpares, the Canadian Auto Worker’s Social Justice Fund, and two from the U.S.: the National Democratic Institution and the Foundation for Democracy. Total funding to Civic Alliance from the six granting agencies, ironically, amounted to roughly \$340,000 – the same amount as the donation successfully blocked as a single grant from the European Union to the Mexican Academy of Human Rights.

Deputy Sanchez Aguilar argued that this foreign participation in national politics was unconstitutional and dangerous. “Since the beginning of this decade the North American [U.S.] government has been financing organizations of Mexican citizens whose activities of electoral surveillance and observation are overwhelmingly political. By extension, any foreign government can see that it can do politics in Mexico by imitating the North Americans and hiding its actions under the cover of Mexican citizens or organizations, thus putting at risk the already precarious sovereignty of the nation.”³

However, making an amendment to the Constitution is a complicated procedure. So, a group of Deputies from the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) found another alternative. On April 23, 1997, a motion to prohibit international funding for electoral observation by modifying the electoral code was passed by the Chamber of Deputies’

³ *La Jornada*, March 28, 1997, “En 1994 y 1995 el gobierno si autorizó fondos externos para observadores,” my translation.

Commission of Government and Constitutional Points. A simple majority of 16 of 30 commissioners, all from the PRI, voted for it. The others, from opposition parties (including Sanchez Aguilar, in protest of his motion being ‘appropriated’ by the PRI) had walked out.

Election observing organizations, including Civic Alliance, the Mexican Academy of Human Rights and others, reacted with alarm. They quickly pointed out that Article 105 of the Constitution prohibits any changes to the electoral code within 90 days of the elections, and, at that point, only 74 days remained until the July 7 elections. For this reason, the motion was frozen until the next legislative session. Nevertheless, Sanchez Aguilar continued to publicly accuse different leaders of NGOs of being “agents of the gringo Administration”. The NGOs responded that this type of statement was part of a campaign orchestrated by the Mexican government to discredit groups who observe elections.

To an extent, government resistance had its effect. National election observers had to be formally registered at the IFE by May 31, 1997. The 33,000 observers registered represented barely a third of the 90,000 who participated in 1994. Organizations operated in an extremely uncertain environment and ended up spending time on their own defense, simply preserving the right and the resources needed to observe --time that it is safe to assume would have otherwise been dedicated to organizing and monitoring activities.

With regard to electoral rights in Mexico, the state has shown a great deal of resistance to international cooperation. State actions have undoubtedly restricted the activity of domestic and international civil society groups in election monitoring. At the same time, state action has prompted the type of boomerang effect that Keck and Sikkink describe, driving civic groups to seek outside resources, as we have seen in the case of Civic Alliance, which was denied government funding as a National Political Group. State action to limit international funding to

the Mexican Academy of Human Rights ended up encouraging a more direct type of political ‘intervention’. The European Union decided to send representatives to observe elections themselves when the resources they wished to delegate to a domestic group could not go through.

International Human Rights Observers in Chiapas

The state has also shown resistance to transnational human rights work. The international nature of the Zapatista movement itself, along with government moves to limit international human rights collaboration in Chiapas, has been evident since the 1994 uprising began, but the latter have intensified since 1997. In response to the continued internationalization of the “low-intensity” struggle currently being waged in Chiapas between the EZLN and the government, the government launched a campaign against observers deemed to be involved in ‘human rights tourism’ and political agitation, rather than ‘serious’ human rights work.

As in the case of election observing, the government has appealed to nationalist sentiment, portraying the globalization of civil society as foreign intervention in national affairs. Jorge Alcocer, the Deputy Minister of the Interior was quoted in May of 1998 as describing the standoff between the government and the Zapatistas by saying, “this is not a conventional war...this is a war of public opinion, a war of declarations and political positions in which the Zapatistas’ most powerful weapon is their support in some sectors of the Mexican public.” Government action has targeted Mexican public opinion and support by trying to portray the Zapatistas as foreign created and supported. This indicates that another related, and powerful weapon of the movement, in government eyes, is its support in some sectors of the international public.

In early 1997, some twenty foreign individuals were deported from Mexico, including four prominent international human rights activists who were detained and expelled because their visas were not correct. These were Nicaraguan former president of the Central American Human Rights Commission, Vilma Nuñez; a Guatemalan representative of the Center for Human Rights Legal Action, Frank LaRue; Benjamin Cuellar of the Central American University (UCA) in El Salvador; and Gilbert Deboisvieux of the French International Human Rights Federation. The four were traveling in the states of Guerrero, Chiapas and Oaxaca as part of an international collaborative team cosponsored by the French International Human Rights Federation and the Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights.

After international shock and outrage at the massacre of 45 unarmed civilians in Acteal, Chiapas on December 22, 1997, which Mexico attempted with some success to portray in the press as a dispute among rival indigenous groups, the deportation of international “observers” in Chiapas began again in earnest. Eight individuals, including U.S., Swiss, German and French activists were expelled in February and March of 1998. On April 11, 1998, government troops raided the Zapatista headquarters in the town of Taniperlas, fueling confrontation between local government supporters and Zapatista sympathizers. During the conflict, twelve foreigners were arrested, four Spaniards, two Canadians, two Belgians, one German and three Americans who were “just passing through”. The foreigners were accused of interfering in Mexican politics and deported the next day. Four days later, three Norwegians staying near Altamirano were detained and deported. The New York Times provided this analysis of the situation: “Authorities have moved to isolate the Zapatistas in national public opinion and weaken their support from foreign groups. At the same time, they have dispatched troops to besiege pro-Zapatista villages and hamper the activities of rights monitors in the area. At least 60 foreigners have been deported

this year (*New York Times*, “Mexico Sees Both Carrot and Stick Fail in Chiapas” May 17, 1998)”. In addition to the 60 reported in the *New York Times*, Alejandro Nadal (1998: 21) reports that 141 other individuals, while not technically deported, were “asked to leave”, and did.

Church workers have been particular targets of the government’s crackdown. French Catholic priest Michel Chanteau, who lived and worked for 32 years in the town of Chenalho, Chiapas was expelled. J.C. Seymour (1998: 333) reports in *Christian Century* magazine that four foreign clerics were deported in February of 1998, and forty Roman Catholic priests were at that time among those being investigated. Even such a notoriously ‘neutral’ organization as the International Red Cross was ordered by the government to cease its operations in Chiapas in January of 1998 (Nadal 1998: 22).

Following international press coverage critical of the deportations, the Mexican government produced evidence to defend its activities. As reported in the *Economist* (May 2, 1998) the government stated that it has records of over 4,500 foreign nationals entering the area of conflict in Chiapas since 1994. The foreigners were associated with “276 different organizations: 96 NGOs; 64 academic and social research institutions; 46 religious institutions; 28 ‘international’ foundations; and 42 private bodies, unclassified... 161 were journalists.” According to Mexican immigration authorities, only 300 of them had come in with visas authorizing them to act as human rights observers.

On May 8, 1998, Mexican immigration authorities announced new restrictions on human rights observers trying to visit Mexico. The announcement was made by Fernando Solis, head of Mexico’s immigration service. “Under the new regulations, human rights observers must seek special visas 60 days before visiting Mexico. They must describe where they will go and with whom they plan to speak. Human rights delegations will be limited to 10 members and visits of

10 days. They must be invited by a Mexican group.”⁴ The new rules were immediately applied to a group of 134 Italians who had come en masse to protest the deportation of human rights observers and had defied Mexican authorities by visiting Taniperlas to check complaints of military and paramilitary harassment of supporter of the EZLN. The majority of the delegation left ‘legally’ on May 9 and 10, but 40 observers who stayed to apply for an extension of the new special observer visas were turned down, arrested, and deported at 4:00am, May 11, 1998. On the same day Televisa, Mexico’s largest television network and *La Crónica de Hoy*, a pro-government newspaper, ran “disparaging” stories on a U.S.-based NGO, Global Exchange, which sends human rights observers to Chiapas and organizes teams of international visitors to observe elections in cooperation with Civic Alliance, accusing the group of meddling in Mexico’s internal affairs. Meanwhile, returning members of the Italian delegation met with European parliament members to encourage them to demand improvements in the human rights situation in Mexico before signing a European Union-Mexico trade agreement.

Some interesting observations can be made about government action in Chiapas. Perhaps the first is the truly international character of human rights activity in Chiapas. In the examples given, nearly a dozen different foreign nationalities are represented. Second is that fact that, as was the case with political rights and election observing, the state seems to be constraining and enabling transnational cooperation at the same time. After deporting some 60 human rights observers in the first half of 1998, the Italians responded by sending a delegation of more than twice that number. When the larger delegation was deported, the Italians took their case to the European Union.

Following the deportation of the Italian delegation and the announcement of such patently problematic new regulations for human rights observers, international players of greater

⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1988, “Mexico Gives Foreign Activists New Rules” p. A5.

weight began to get involved in the conflict between the Mexican government and citizens acting globally in Chiapas. On May 13, 1998, European legislators in the European Parliament did pass an interim accord between Mexico and the European Union, but only after a debate in which the majority of the speakers expressed reservations about Mexico's human rights record. Human Rights Watch of the Americas, an internationally prominent NGO, wrote a formal letter of protest about the new restrictions to Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo, invoking the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights, which recognizes rights of association, freedom of speech and freedom of movement for foreigners. Government efforts to sway national public opinion by crying "intervention" are as of yet inconclusive. The "national sovereignty" challenge to the actions of human rights observers in Chiapas has not yet been resolved, certainly the government has made it more difficult for foreigners to visit Chiapas, but it has also encourage other types of international involvement and generated a significant amount of international media coverage.

Economic Rights and the Small Debtors Movement

The case of El Barzón is a different example of the internationalization of civil society. El Barzón is the name for a loosely organized national movement of small and medium business owners, who because of the mismanagement of the national economy have incurred unmanageable bank debt, and have decided to defend their economic rights by refusing to pay. A "barzón" is a strap used for yoking oxen, the name alludes to the idea that by banding together, an impossible load, such as the debt that has been placed on the shoulders of the Mexican public, can be moved.

Barzón members do not generally seek international assistance in the form of direct donations, as is the case of the Mexican Academy of Human Rights and Civic Alliance. While their demonstrations staged in front of banks, with protesters stripping down to nothing but underwear and socks (“the bank has taken everything; there is nothing left to take”) have been attention-getting, the “Barzonistas”, as the movements followers are called, are not making their demands in a manner as directly confrontational as the methods of the Zapatista movement, which has gone so far as to set up autonomous, ‘parallel’ local government entities in municipalities in Chiapas. Nevertheless, El Barzón is not totally dissimilar. It is trying to influence state policy, and finding channels blocked, has turned to international support to do it.

The difference is this: as opposed to the cases of transnational cooperation outlined in the paper so far, El Barzón has not invited foreigners “in” to help, they have gone “out” to act. In this sense, it is perhaps the closest example we have seen of a domestic attempt to activate Keck and Sikkink’s “boomerang” pattern. The “boomerang” strategy –seeking to employ international pressure when domestic protest is ineffective- is not new to the Barzón. Shortly after its founding in 1993 in Jalisco, when local authorities ignored the group’s request to meet and discuss grievances, members blockaded a main highway between Guadalajara and Chapala (home to many U.S. expatriates) and sent a delegation to block the international bridge between Ciudad Juarez and El Paso (Senzek 1997: 28).

According to Barkin, Ortiz and Rosen (1997: 14) El Barzón, in recent years, “has made itself so independent of the country’s ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that it has become the first major opposition group since the days of the Mexican revolution to negotiate with foreign powers about Mexico’s future.” A representative of the debtor’s movement, small business owner Jose Maria Imaz “spent this past November [1996] in New York and

Washington, meeting with officials of the leading brokerages doing business in Mexico, representatives of the International Monetary Fund, key anti-NAFTA congresspeople and members of a wide range of think tanks.” Imaz was negotiating with these international powers-that-be on behalf of El Barzón, requesting help to restructure Mexico’s internal debt. Imaz advised them that if the Mexican government continued to ask small debtors to pay truly impossible amounts of money and shoulder the heaviest burden, while bailing out big business and banks, his group would call on members of the organization and all other debtors to simply refuse to pay and bring the entire banking system to a screeching halt.

In this case, the state has not attempted to restrict domestic efforts to transnationalize their support. Some claim that the supporters of El Barzón are better connected and educated than other groups. (Senzek 1997: 28) While this hypothesis may hold in comparison to the Zapatistas it is patently untrue in the case of election observing groups, which have strong ties to academic institutions, national celebrities and other political figures, and a significant number of members from the middle and upper classes. Others have observed that the more than 350,000 legal cases brought by members of El Barzón in local courts are keeping government so engaged with the group locally that it does not have time to take it on in another context. (The majority of these cases are local complaints stemming from the fact that Mexico’s ten largest banks were privatized by President Salinas after a Congressionally-set limit date had passed. Plaintiffs argue that since the banks that are owed money were not established in strict accordance with the law, therefore they do not legally exist, nor do the debts owed to them, (Barkin et. al. 1997: 15).

Our initial observation, that El Barzón has not brought foreigners “in”, either financially or physically, to the jurisdiction of the state, is perhaps a better explanation. The opportunities for state control and resistance to the type of activities engaged in by El Barzón as described

above are much more limited than the political/diplomatic maneuvering apparent in the first two cases. It is easier for the state to act within its own borders. By taking their case on the road, El Barzón slips out of state reach. Also, international action of the type requested, a restructuring of Mexico's foreign debt, is not exactly an action threatening to the state, except in that the government may dislike the idea that a non-state actor has gotten involved in the process of negotiation. Finally, in the hypothetical case that international financial actors would become motivated to act in a manner adverse to the state by the pleas of this group, it should be noted that they are not an easy target for the Mexican government.

Conclusion

We have seen how in the case of both political (electoral) and human rights, the state has shown resistance to the "globalization" of civil society. With regard to economic rights, the state has shown less concern for restricting domestic efforts to obtain international support. While state actions have successfully restricted the flow of resources and individuals entering the country from outside in support of election monitoring and human rights activities, the government has been less effective in stemming the activity of its own citizens acting in outside venues, as was the case of El Barzón's meetings in Washington and New York.

We have also seen how state efforts to circumvent the boomerang strategy have in a certain sense enabled the strategy. In this sense, it is no longer pressure from domestic groups which encourages international actors to intervene. At a second stage, it is state reaction directly affecting the international community that prompts continued pressure. In other words, the engagement between the state and the "global" becomes direct.

As Susanne Rudolf (1997: 1) notes in relation to religious communities and movements, the difficulty for the organizations of civil society is that they occupy “a space that is neither within the state nor an aspect of the international system, but animates both.” This overlapping terrain is not easy for civil society actors to negotiate, theorize or justify. The organizations of civil society are themselves at least partly responsible for the continued tendency to make mutually exclusive distinctions that assume that state and civil society are separate.

Alison Brysk, (forthcoming: 16) writing on the globalization of indigenous movements, notes that “non-governmental organizations such as development and human rights organizations typically claim to be apolitical and autonomous from state power, and base the legitimacy of their transnational activities on this claim.” At the same time, as the author goes on to point out, these groups pursue goals and objectives that challenge state power, that are political: “these groups are inspired and guided by principled goals with political implications.” Even Keck and Sikkink (1998:2) who emphasize the principled nature of the global civil society actors they call transnational advocacy networks, recognize that such networks are political spaces and “their goal is to change the behavior of states and international organizations.”

Non-governmental and popular organizations, social movements, civic associations, foundations and individuals acting across national boundaries do engage the state. They are not apolitical, except in the sense that they may not run candidates for office. The nature of their transformative goals brings them into “state” terrain. The increasingly international makeup of their participants and supporters creates confusion over how they should be understood and represented on the national level. Macdonald (1994:285) raises the point that civil society may be “shifting allegiances away from the nation-state toward alternative modes of representation of interests.”

From a perspective of interest in governance, this is a somewhat alarming point. We cannot yet imagine practically what those alternative modes might be, and states, especially those like Mexico which do not have a dominant role in the global political scene, may be well justified in questioning whose interests will be represented. The institutions of global governance are very much nascent institutions. If we are indeed witnessing a transition from an international order based on the nation-state to a new globalized order, it is by no means clear what that new order will be. The ‘weaker’ nations in the system are well justified in their wariness to embrace an order they have little control over.

In the end, it is the very ambiguity in understanding civil society on the part of all of the actors involved – namely, the expectation that civil society should be separate and autonomous from states both nationally and globally, while accepting that the role of many civil society organizations is political and the goals of all are transformative-- that gives states justification for their resistance to transnational action by civil society actors. The Mexican government’s strategic resistance to international ‘intervention’ around elections and the conflict in Chiapas on the grounds of national sovereignty is facilitated, ultimately, by a general failure of all parties to understand and recognize the interconnectedness of the state-civil society relationship. If we can begin to recognize and theorize this interconnectedness, it may be possible to concretely visualize and act on the idea that “sovereignty is a shared set of understandings and expectations about state authority that is reinforced by practices, [and] changes in these practices and understandings should in turn transform sovereignty,” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998: 37).

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